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UNCLAS CAIRO 007766

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FOR PRM/A, PRM/AFR, PRM/ANE, PRM/MCE, NEA/ELA, AND AF
ROME FOR DHS/CIS
GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SUDANESE DEMONSTRATIONS FORCE UNHCR CLOSURE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (SBU) A PEACEFUL BUT GROWING DEMONSTRATION BY SUDANESE REFUGEES HAS FORCED UNHCR TO CLOSE ITS OFFICE IN CAIRO. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE, SAAD AL ATTAR, AND SEVERAL CRITICAL SECURITY PERSONNEL, STAFF-MEMBERS HAVE BEEN SENT HOME AND UNHCR HAS SENT OUT EMAILS ADVISING THAT THE OFFICE WILL NOT BE OPERATIONAL FOR THE TIME BEING.

2. (SBU) ACCORDING TO PROTECTION OFFICER, INGE DE LANGHE, ABOUT 50 DEMONSTRATORS TOOK UP POSITION IN A SMALL PARK NEAR UNHCR'S OFFICE WITH TENTS AND BANNERS LATE LAST WEEK. DURING THE WEEKEND MORE ARRIVED AND WHEN REFCOORD VISITED THE SITE THIS MORNING, MONDAY, OCTOBER 10, THE CROWD HAD GROWN TO AROUND 1,000 WITH BUSLOADS CONTINUING TO ARRIVE. THE DEMONSTRATION IS PEACEFUL WITH ALMOST A PICNIC ATMOSPHERE. EGYPTIAN POLICE ARE STANDING BY BUT SEEM QUITE RELAXED ABOUT THE SITUATION. THIS IS IN MARKED CONTRAST TO THE VIOLENT RIOT STAGED BY SUDANESE IN AUGUST LAST YEAR (SEPTEL) WHEN REFUGEES ATTACKED THE UNHCR OFFICE INJURING SEVERAL POLICE AND CAUSING CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE.

3. (SBU) ACCORDING TO DE LANGHE, UNHCR BELIEVES THE SUDANESE ARE RECENT ARRIVALS FROM THE SOUTH (NOT DARFUR). THEY ARE NOT REGISTERED OR RECOGNIZED REFUGEES AND SEEM TO BE QUITE WELL ORGANIZED WITH WELL-CRAFTED BANNERS CRITICIZING UNHCR'S DECISION TO CEASE REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATIONS (RSDS) FOR SUDANESE IN JUNE 2004 AND OPPOSING REPATRIATION. SOME OF THE BANNERS DEMAND THIRD COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT. UNHCR MET FOR AN ENTIRE DAY WITH THE SUDANESE OVER THE WEEKEND BUT FAILED TO DEFUSE THE DEMONSTRATION.

4. (SBU) IT IS UNCLEAR WHO IS ORGANIZING THE DEMONSTRATION BUT IT HAS INVOLVED SOME CAREFUL PLANNING WITH THE PROVISION OF BUSES, TENTS, FOOD AND NUMEROUS BANNERS. UNHCR BELIEVES THE SITUATION IS BEING FUELED BY THE APPARENT EASE WITH WHICH SUDANESE ASYLUM SEEKERS CAN OBTAIN VISAS TO COME TO CAIRO.

5. (SBU) UNHCR FEARS THAT THE SUDANESE ARE PREPARING FOR A LONG SIEGE AND IF THE NUMBERS KEEP GROWING THE EGYPTIAN AUTHORITIES WILL FEEL COMPELLED TO TAKE COUNTERMEASURES.

6. (U) KHARTOUM MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.

RICCIARDONE